

May 16, 2014

Dear Mayor Benjamin and Town Council,

Town Manager Gene Swearingen has indicated to the Safe Routes To Schools (SRTS) Citizens Advisory Committee that the Town and State Highway Administration (SHA) may well choose to expedite the design phase of the Garrett Park sidewalks project by using a design firm pre-approved by SHA, specifically, Century Engineering. He has informed us that he and Mayor Benjamin met with representatives of Century Engineering and found them to be well qualified to undertake the project. Our understanding is that Century Engineering is currently preparing a task order cost proposal to SHA and that SHA is concurrently making an independent evaluation of the labor hours required for the design.

What is apparently not clear at this time is how Century Engineering, SHA and the Town would relate to each other in terms of project direction and responsibilities. Since the existing overall task order contract involved is between SHA and Century Engineering, the Engineering firm would fairly obviously not be reporting contractually to the Town.

We understand the desire to expedite a potentially long bureaucratic process, but the members of the SRTS Citizens Advisory Committee wish to ensure that the Committee will be in a position to properly act upon the charge given to it by the Mayor and Council. Everyone is very concerned that the design phase of this project meets the particular needs of Garrett Park. The Committee needs sufficient interactive involvement with the design and implementation process to allow us to assure our fellow residents that the unique and sylvan character of the Town is being protected in a positive and imaginative manner during the process of retrofitting SRTS sidewalks into Garrett Park, if indeed that is the case. The Committee also believes it can help.

Garrett Park is a community that prizes its special character, generated through a combination of architectural, historical and environmental conditions. We need sidewalks that enhance, not detract from, those qualities. In particular, the sidewalks design must address tree root protection and storm water flow mitigation in order to preserve the character of our streetscapes. Likewise, although subordinate to tree protection and essential ADA requirements, the sidewalk alignments should flow in concert with the historic street layout emphasized in Garrett Park's National Register of Historic Places nomination.

We would appreciate receiving more information about the process by which this project will move forward and also about Century Engineering and its relevant experience and staffing. We also await more information about how Century Engineering would be given direction: exclusively by SHA, exclusively by the Town or by both parties jointly. We similarly look forward to advice on the degree of flexibility that will be provided by the task order contract, and the latest content of the scope of work.

The SRTS Citizens Advisory Committee feels there is a minimum level of active involvement between the Committee, with its diverse member expertise including architecture and transportation engineering, and SHA and Century Engineering. This minimum level, derived in part based on the earlier highly successful Strathmore-Knowles (MD 547) improvement project and its own advisory committee involvement, calls for the Engineering firm (with SHA as appropriate) to meet with our Committee as they begin their design work, again as they reach a 20% design mark, and finally as they approach the 95% design mark assuming the project proceeds to that point. Of course the Engineering firm will be making presentations to the Town as a whole at the 30% design decision point, and we trust there will be additional interaction if and when any special problems or need for Committee input are identified at other times.

The Committee stands ready to help in development of a sidewalks design that will allow residents, neighbors and explorers of Garrett Park to safely enjoy walking through our sylvan and historic neighborhood, whether they be children at play, school attendees, seniors, or other pedestrians. We have already undertaken and documented a tree walk assessment in conjunction with the Town Arborist and the Arboretum Committee Chair that is allowing discussion of tree impacts and protection to proceed on a more factual basis. The Committee trusts we will be afforded the access to the design process necessary to properly support continuing forward with the charge the Committee has been given.

Sincerely,

The SRTS Committee

Dave Almy

Lori Conlan

Kathy Hedge

John Mulligan

Alison Pearce

Richard Pratt